



Reintegration Program: Does Your Organization Need to Build One?

About the EPS Reintegration Program

Since its inception in 2009, the peer-driven EPS Reintegration Program has assisted first responders and other public safety personnel in returning to work after a critical incident or long-term absence from the workplace due to a physical or psychological injury. Members of the Reintegration Team do their work in partnership with clinicians and other stakeholders (e.g. Workers' Compensation Board) to build the member's return-to-work plan. The program has two streams, each with its own goal:

1. *Short term.* Delivered after involvement in a critical event such as, officer involved shootings, major collisions, attempted disarmings, serious assaults, fatalities and more. It is intended to be delivered post event and prior to a psychological injury. One hundred and seventy EPS members have accessed this program to date.
2. *Long term.* Focused on returning members to work after a physical and/or psychological injury has occurred. It is possible that there has been a leave of absence from the workplace, a need for modified duties or a possibility that they are your organization's "Working Wounded". Seventy-five EPS members have accessed this program to date.

**In the last three years, The Reintegration Team has also worked with members in the disciplinary process on a voluntary basis. This has had the effect of helping members to feel invested in continuing to work on areas for growth while awaiting decisions from inquiries.*

How Does the Long Term Program Work?

If dealing with a psychological injury, members will work with their clinical and reintegration team to build a personalized list of stress-inducing environments, situations, and/or equipment (e.g. shooting range, courthouse, police car, ambulance, fire truck, emergency lights, etc.). This "Fear Hierarchy" becomes the Reintegration Team's road map for implementing relevant exposure opportunities that gradually increase stimuli in a controlled, systematic way. Peer-supported exposures to elements on the member's Fear Hierarchy work to build the member's occupation-related confidence and competence. Similarly, peer-supported street exposures (i.e. going to stress-inducing calls or places) work to reduce and normalize the member's stress response.

At times, there is no clinical diagnosis but the member is seeking assistance. Other injuries or conditions may necessitate a different process and supports from the reintegration team. Ultimately, the goal is a sustainable return to the workplace with confidence and competence.

Compelling Evidence

Outcomes of Implementing a Reintegration Program

- a. *EPS PTSD Diagnosis After a Critical Event.* To date, based on known diagnosis; less than five percent of the 170 EPS members who have accessed the short term stream of the EPS Reintegration Program have received a diagnosis of PTSD. This is significantly below the national average of 20-25% for police officers with a PTSD diagnosis (depending on the study).



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- b. *EPS Comparison of Lost Workdays.* EPS's Evidence-Based Policing Unit conducted an internal analysis of WCB data on lost workdays in the EPS (Lejuene). It found a 70 percent reduction in lost days after the implementation of the Reintegration Program in its current iteration.
- c. *Alberta Health Services (AHS) Cost Reduction.* Based on WCB statistics in 2018, AHS Northern Alberta cohort showed a 50 percent reduction in claims costs including a decrease in disability days compared to the Southern Alberta cohort (who did not have a reintegration program at that time). AHS currently have a reintegration program that is province wide and are in the process of obtaining statistics from WCB to conduct an analysis on the numbers from the last two years. Since the beginning of their program they have completed 2000 sessions with AHS employees.
- d. *Upcoming Evidence Based Research.* EPS is currently working with Hero's in Mind, Advocacy and Research Consortium (HiMARC) and other independent researchers to complete several other evidence-based studies on the EPS Reintegration Program.

Outcomes of Implementing Reintegration Program Facilitator Training

- a. *Impact of a Reintegration Program Training Course.* A 2019 University of Alberta study (Jones et al.) found a statistically significant increase in mental health literacy and reduction of stigma among those who attended a five-day Reintegration Program Facilitator Training course. The study was the first of its kind: A second study is awaiting funding.

Who Has Taken EPS Reintegration Training?

The following are some of the agencies that have taken the EPS Reintegration Training and are in the process of developing their own programs: Abbotsford Police Service; Alberta Fish and Wildlife; Alberta Health Services; Alberta Corrections; Alberta Sheriffs; Calgary Fire Department; Calgary Police Service; Edmonton Fire Department; London Police Service; Niagara Police Service; Ottawa Police Service; RCMP; Maui Police Department; New Zealand Police.

Considerations for Starting Your Own Reintegration Program

Cost Savings. In your planning, keep in mind that an established reintegration program is shown to reduce an organization's number of lost workdays and contribute to an overall reduction in premiums. In addition, first responder organizations already have the necessary resources to implement robust and relevant series of exposure opportunities for the participating member (e.g. gun range, equipment, vehicles, lights, sirens, etc.). Most of the cost of this program exists in the time we spend working with members.

Staffing. In the beginning, adjunct duties can likely be assigned as required. Depending on the needs of your organization, you may eventually choose to add one or two dedicated reintegration positions.

Training. You will need to invest in the initial mental health training your team requires.



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Credibility. It is essential to choose the right people for your Reintegration Team. They must have organizational credibility and be generally well thought of throughout the organization. This will help to build rapport in the early stages of your program. They must also be proven capable of maintaining confidentiality: One breach of trust will undermine everything that you are trying to build.

Expertise. It is necessary to have team members with expertise in their profession to create a defensible program and mitigate risk for your organization. It is crucial that at least a few people on your team are historically or currently serving as firearms instructors, control tactics instructors, or instructor-level personnel from other first responder groups. This is so that they can support what is currently being endorsed by your agency from a firearms, tactics, and skills perspective, and can access and operate your range/ training environments safely.

This expertise is also important because people returning to the workplace often have a feeling of incompetence due to the length of time away or the circumstances of their leave. A highly skilled trainer will be able to distinguish between the member's perception versus the reality of their skills and create a plan to reach the desired outcome.

Interest. Last, it is important that the people on your team have an active interest in promoting mental health. It is even better if they are a part of your peer support team or have additional mental health training. Not every person on your team needs to be a trainer and a peer supporter. A cross-trained team will meet your needs.

Available Training Resources

1. Reintegration Training - offered by the Edmonton Police Service and 'K' Division RCMP
2. Prolonged Exposure Training - developed by Dr. Edna Foa and facilitated by Dr. Megan McElheran
3. Critical Incident Stress Management Training - International Critical Incident Stress Foundation
4. Psychological First Aid Training / Applied Suicide Intervention Skills / Road to Mental Readiness
5. Clinicians that are vetted to work with first responders

For more program information and assistance with program development, please email Staff Sergeant Glen Klose and Sergeant Colleen Mooney at reintegration@edmontonpolice.ca.

References

1. Lejeune, A. (2018). *EPS Reintegration Program Evaluation Final Report* (pp. 15, Rep.). Edmonton, Alberta: Edmonton Police Service
2. Jones, C., Pike, A., & Brémault-Phillips, S. (2019, October). *Edmonton Police Services Workplace Reintegration Program: Analysis of a trainer training initiative*. [Conference Presentation]. Military and Veteran Health Research Forum Ottawa, Canada
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338229406_Edmonton_Police_Service_Workplace_Reintegration_Program_Analysis_of_a_Facilitator_Training_Initiative